

Health Workforce Council

Policy Recommendations to Address COVID-19 Impacts to the Health Workforce

Background

The Health Workforce Council met on May 8, 2020, with the goal of identifying key policy areas most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The Council identified the following policy areas: Career Pathways & Models of Education Delivery; PPE & Technology; and Industry Engagement & Building Partnerships.

Council members signed up to participate in work groups honing each policy area into specific, actionable recommendations to provide to policymakers, for consideration in a special legislative session, or immediate Congressional action. These draft recommendations are items that the Council has prioritized as the most impactful in the short-term to address some of the health workforce issues caused or exacerbated by COVID-19, with particular consideration for both cost, and time for implementation.

Guiding Principles

Given the limited time available for recommendation setting, the Council was unable to come to consensus on specific recommendations for the following items, but members felt that they were important to specifically call out as important items for consideration as the situation continues to evolve.

- The Council believes strongly in **equitable access to personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare students and their educators**, to ensure the continuation of the health workforce pipeline. These students and educators require access to personal protective equipment (PPE) not unlike those licensed front-line workers, but their specific needs vary by occupation, professional duties, and healthcare practice setting.
- The Council supports the **continued salary enhancement of health workforce educators to allow for the hiring and retention of clinical faculty**, and the ongoing support for this work. Funding previously allocated for staff compensation increases should continue to be prioritized for that purpose. The Council recognizes that funds are extremely limited at this time, but maintenance of health educator compensation has a significant impact in the ability to bring on and retain quality faculty from the field, which in turn contributes to more positive outcomes for health workforce education and training.

Work Group Title: Career Pathways & Models of Education Delivery

Problem Statement

COVID-19's impact is not limited to the disruption of existing employment; educational training and professional development efforts have also been hampered by the pandemic. To counter this, the Health Workforce Council has identified two areas which require immediate attention: the significant hurdles faced in the delivery of healthcare education and training methods; and the challenges to establishing new career pathways between workers and employers.

Key questions for health-related workforce development are:

1. How can we ensure access to career pathway options resulting in family-wage employment for our students and healthcare workers seeking additional professional training?
2. What are effective ways to enable a faster recovery for training providers and students across all healthcare occupations?
3. How will the education system manage the both the students returning to training following a disruption in education timelines, and the potential influx of dislocated workers looking to train for more in-demand occupations, such as healthcare?

DRAFT Recommendation for Council Approval

1. The Council recommends selecting up to three apprenticeship programs in different regions of the state, with the intention of providing instruction for the program in the second-most predominant language in the area, other than English. Funds would support the translation of the related supplemental instruction (RSI), and hiring an instructor fluent in the language selected.
2. Create a Health Careers COVID-19 Response Grant for educational institutions (both secondary and postsecondary). Grant funds would support implementing the necessary modifications to health-related classroom and lab space to ensure student and staff safety (equipment purchases and staff time for installation), developing content for online or hybrid education opportunities, and staff training. (**Co-recommendation** with the PPE & Technology Work Group)

Items for Further Study

- Apprenticeship navigators, or account executives, to assist with the administrative requirements involved in setting up an apprenticeship program.
- Creating a standardized apprenticeship application for employers wishing to join an existing apprenticeship program.
- Pilot - Select a high-needs field (e.g. long-term care, or LTC) to map a pathway to 1-2 other health occupations. Bring together education providers to map the pathway and create a credentialed pathway where LTC is the entry-point.

Work Group Title: PPE & Technology

Problem Statement

The pandemic has created a critical and immediate need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and changes in healthcare delivery methods in Washington, resulting in an unprecedented impact on the healthcare workforce.

In particular, students enrolled in ongoing healthcare training and education programs face additional burdens to completing these programs: limited access to appropriate and sufficient PPE; transitioning to a virtual training/telehealth model; and inadequate support from existing COVID-related funding sources to overcome these challenges. Likewise, the educators responsible for their clinical and didactic training experience significant hurdles to ensuring the incoming healthcare workers are adequately and safely prepared to enter the workforce.

As Washington's phased approach to reopening the state is implemented, the workforce will begin to incrementally recover. During this period, it is imperative that healthcare students and educators are sufficiently supported, protected, and resourced as they attempt to provide care for Washingtonians.

Key questions for health-related workforce development are:

1. How can we ensure availability of standardized PPE for our healthcare educators and students?
2. How can technology enable a more efficient process for students and educators across all healthcare occupations?
3. What updates need to happen at educational institutions to meet safety requirements going forward?

DRAFT Recommendations for Council Approval

1. The Council recommends that the Department of Health (with funds allocated for this purpose) convene a workgroup to review the new health workforce-specific emergency rules and provisional WAC changes implemented since March of 2020 focused on the state response to COVID-19, including changes to telemedicine, simulation for educational content, and licensing. The Department shall make recommendations on extending, or making permanent, any temporary changes to the appropriate committees of the Legislature and Governor.
2. Create a Health Careers COVID-19 Response Grant for educational institutions (both secondary and postsecondary). The fund would support implementing the necessary modifications to health-related classroom and lab space to ensure student and staff safety (both in terms of equipment, and staff time), developing content for online or hybrid education opportunities, and staff training. (**Co-recommendation** with Career Pathways & Models of Education Work Group)

Item for Further Consideration

- Explore the feasibility of a shared space incentive for education program offerings including lab space and classrooms for off-hour instruction time.

Work Group Title: Industry Engagement & Building Partnerships

Problem Statement

COVID-19 has created unique challenges and strained the capacity of our state's education and training systems. Now more than ever, the state relies on the engagement of industry to help ensure that the state's workers are learning the needed skills and content to be responsive to rapid changes in the health workforce sector.

Key questions for health-related workforce development are:

1. How can fortifying existing industry relationships, and creating new ones with providers, facilities, and suppliers speed up the recovery process?
2. Is there a way for industry to help the education system to enable a faster recovery for providers across all healthcare occupations?
3. What updates need to happen at the state level to stimulate opportunities for industry engagement in education and training going forward?

DRAFT Recommendation for Council Approval

1. Implement a pilot program to support region-specific healthcare industry engagement at up to three Workforce Development Councils (WDC), in partnership with the local Accountable Communities of Health. Funding would allow the hiring of an industry engagement coordinator (coordinator) at each selected WDC, with the charge of focused industry engagement to better align the local education pipeline with specific healthcare industry needs at all education and training levels. The coordinator would provide updates to the Health Workforce Council. The WDCs selected for the pilot should ensure a mix of geographic, socioeconomic, and racial diversity.

The chief role of this position is to facilitate a quarterly convening of a roundtable of health employers, workers, community-based organizations, and education providers with the following responsibilities:

- Analyze the Health Workforce Sentinel Network results (on a biannual basis), and determine if local changes are necessary to address emerging trends or industry needs identified in the results.
- Provide an opportunity for industry and education to hear directly about emerging skill needs, and opportunities for addressing skill needs with education/training programs.
- Develop recommendations for local and state policy changes to address region-specific needs.
- Track and assist with implementation of goals and initiatives of the local roundtable.